

# **The Value of Trees in the Landscape**

By Donna L. Michael, Jefferson County Extension Horticulturist

A tree in the landscape is a treasure. It is also one that we often take for granted until certain events occur that threaten its life expectancy. Droughts, freeze damage, flooding and other environmental conditions can affect the health and vigor of shade trees and cause them to become stressed.

Plant decline, as a result of episodic conditions can affect a plant's health for several years. Such conditions make landscape plants more vulnerable to insect and disease attacks.

While you may love to look at trees, do you really look at the trees in your own yard? A monthly close inspection may help prevent serious cost later. Begin this winter by examining the trunk of your trees. Are there any cracks or splits in the bark? Look for wounds, bark removed or decay in the trunk. With a pair of binoculars, check for cavities in large limbs up in the canopy of the tree. This is easier to see now that leaves have fallen.

In the spring once new growth has developed, look at your trees for overall color, twig dieback and leaves smaller than normal. During the summer be aware of any early coloration and leaf drop. All of these symptoms are stress signs that may warrant attention from an expert.

Look for leaning in trees, circling or girdling roots on soil surface. Trees that have narrow angled branches, or dual trunks (Co-dominant forks) have greater potential to break. Trees where pavement, walkways or driveways have covered a large root area are at risk. These trees not only have weather strikes against them but physical and structural problems that may shorten their existence.

While the removal of large branches may make you feel more secure after you've experienced a windy thunder storm, do not let anyone top mature trees. Topping upsets the balance of the leaf to root ratio and slowly starves the tree. Removing large branches leaves wounds that do not callus or heal and lead to rot. Once decay begins it may spread into the trunk, ultimately killing the tree.

Cutting large roots on one or more sides of a tree as a result of construction or installation of wire can increase the risk of blow-over. Adding fill soil or working under trees with roto-tillers can kill roots and make trees more vulnerable.

If all of this looking and inspecting seems overwhelming or too much to handle, get help. There are certified arborists, trained professionals, who for a minor fee can help you evaluate your problems. They can help you make those difficult decisions.

So why should you care if trees remain healthy or even if they remain in your landscape?

First, let's talk money. The house is just one element in the market value of property.

Trees and other plants are tangible assets worth real money. Depending on what statistical data you read, trees can add between 8 to 20 % real estate values. According to Money magazine, landscapes with mature trees can bring a recovery value of 100 to 200% at selling time. How often do you get those kinds of returns?

On the practical part of having and maintaining trees, the American Public Power Association states that trees and other landscape plants can reduce air conditioning expenses by 50%. Trees can reduce bothersome noise by up to 50% according to the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Trees connect us with nature. Although difficult to gauge, trees are essential to our emotional health giving us a higher life satisfaction. Looking at trees and green spaces provide relief from our daily lives. There have been actual studies that show trees in the landscape relax us, lower our heart rates and help us heal quicker after an injury. Maybe the most important reason to plant trees is they are our mark or our symbolic link with all humanity.